

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002882

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PDP FAILS TO RESOLVE INTERNAL CRISIS

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Classified by DCM Timothy Andrews. Reasons 1.5 (B & D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: PDP officials hoped that the October 14 meeting between the President and PDP legislators and governors would effectuate a rapprochement within the divided party. The session did not meet these expectations. Insiders told us that the meeting was acrimonious and a less-than-adequate "apology" by Obasanjo did not satisfy the National Assembly members. Vice-president Atiku was notably absent from the meeting. In the end, the only achievement was the appointment of another committee to negotiate with both sides in the ongoing crisis. Failure to resolve the issue only delays much anticipated decisions by Obasanjo and the PDP which could make succession scenarios clearer. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) The PDP meeting on Monday October 14 was well attended, with PDP legislators, governors, dozens of party members and the President all participating. Conspicuously absent was Vice President Atiku Abubakar. A PDP insider told Poloff that Atiku absented himself to avoid expected questions about the timing of party primaries. While Obasanjo preferred holding the Presidential primary first, Atiku had hinted that his preference to hold the Presidential primary last. The insider said that Obasanjo's supporters had planned to pin Atiku down on the issue and force Atiku's hand on his often-bruited presidential aspirations. According to one of the attendees, the atmosphere was "acrimonious." There was more recrimination than reconciliation.

¶13. (C) National Party Chairman Adu Ogbeh stressed, as he did in an earlier meeting with AF/W Director Michael Arietti that day, that the PDP's electoral chances at all levels of elections in 2003 would be greatly diminished if the warring party members did not reunite. In spite of Ogbeh's urgings, House Speaker Ghali Na'Abba criticized Obasanjo for supporting the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission's (ICPC) investigation against him. Na'abba reportedly told the President, "I may have done some things which the ICPC could find fault with," but said that Obasanjo should be cautious because "similar accusations could be launched against many close to the Presidency as well."

¶14. (C) Discussing the impeachment efforts, several PDP members said the list of 32 offenses allegedly committed by Obasanjo were not impeachable offenses. Responding to these comments, Na'Abba assented to call a meeting of the PDP Assembly caucus to discuss withdrawing the impeachment threat. However, according to a PDP official, only Na'Abba and Deputy Speaker Chibudom Nwuche showed up for the caucus.

¶15. (C) Faced with mounting opposition, Obasanjo offered an apology of sorts. According to press reports, Obasanjo said he was not seeking to impeach Na'Abba and Senate President Anyim Pius Anyim and urged everyone to "open lines of communications" in an effort to resolve the party's internal conflicts. An attendee at the meeting commented to Poloff that Obasanjo's statement, rather than giving the apology demanded by the Legislative Branch, was diplomatic but inadequate. Obasanjo reiterated his position that he had really done nothing impeachable, but allowed mistakes could have been made.

¶16. (C) After all that was said among the principals who attended, there was no breakthrough. Carefully, the attendees agreed to appoint a 15-member committee to discuss the findings of the previously constituted 10-member panel on ways to resolve the crisis. No timetable was set for these deliberations, but the House and Senate members reportedly agreed to put impeachment efforts on hold until after the new committee prepared its report. According to another source, Obasanjo is finally realizing that he may have some trouble with his image, but was still

being misled by Minister of Works and Housing Tony Anenih, who "swears on his Bible to Obasanjo that he can deliver reelection without making any concessions."

17. (C) Meanwhile, Obasanjo has taken no overt steps to meet the demands of Atiku and his key Northern backers from 1999 (reftel). Atiku told us privately that he had little hope that tangible progress was in the offing and that he had low expectations for this latest reconciliation committee.

18. (U) Briefing the press after the meeting, Ogbeh said that the meeting was "one of the best the party has held since he became chairman."

19. (C) COMMENT: This meeting had been referred to by many PDP insiders as a "make or break" meeting. Falling short, the result does not strengthen optimism that the PDP can work out its internal differences and adopt a winning strategy for the upcoming round of elections. By ignoring or delaying the difficult issues underlying the PDP's rift, scenarios for party conventions, elections and presidential succession remain as murky as ever.

JETER